



**TOWN OF LAUDERDALE-BY-THE-SEA
TOWN COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
Jarvis Hall
4505 N. Ocean Drive
Tuesday, July 29, 2025
6:30 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER, MAYOR EDMUND MALKOON

Mayor Edmund Malkoon called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. Also present were Vice Mayor Randy Strauss, Commissioner Richard DeNapoli, Commissioner John A. Graziano, Commissioner Theo Pouloupoulos (by phone), Town Manager Linda Connors, Deputy Town Manager/Public Works Director Ken Rubach, Town Attorney Susan L. Trevarthen, Director of Budget and Finance Lucila Lang, Assistant Director of Budget and Finance Edner St. Jean, Development Services Director Jhanelle Campbell, and Assistant to the Town Manager/Acting Town Clerk Courtney Easley.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

3. NEW BUSINESS

a. Discussion Regarding the Town Manager Position

Mayor Malkoon explained that tonight's meeting will address the Town Manager position contract. He read the following statement into the record at this time:

As Mayor, I have a unique responsibility not only to preside over this Commission, but to safeguard the integrity, effectiveness, and direction of our government. I did not call this special meeting lightly. It follows comments I made during the last meeting, comments grounded in my duties as Mayor and supported by firsthand experience with the day-to-day workings of this Town. It is not just social.

This is not a "he said, she said;" I am not a bystander of this organization. I am the Mayor. I speak not from rumor or speculation, but from direct involvement in how this Town is run. Each of us plays a critical role in shaping policy, overseeing operations, and ensuring that [inaudible]. Collectively, this Commission has contributed greatly to Lauderdale-By-The-Sea's stability and success, but that success depends on mutual trust, responsiveness, and alignment in leadership. When those principles falter, it becomes our duty to ask the hard questions and consider the path forward.

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The reason for this meeting is because in order to have a discussion with the Commission, we have to have a publicly noticed meeting due to the Florida Sunshine Law. That is the reason why this meeting is called to order. I thank you for your presence and attention tonight.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

At this time Mayor Malkoon opened public comment.

Stuart Dodd, resident, asked if the reason behind tonight's discussion was the result of minor disagreements and personality conflicts or a serious lack of judgment on the part of the Town Manager. He proposed that the Commission consider scheduling a roundtable event for a less formal open discussion of their concerns, with the Town Manager present as an observer.

Bob Harrington, resident, spoke in support of the Town Manager, stating that he hoped she would continue in her position and felt she was doing a good job.

Marc Pearson, resident, recalled that he has spoken at previous Town Commission meetings regarding concerns with a house under construction in his neighborhood. He described his communications with Town Staff on this issue, as well as details regarding Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, asserting that Town Staff has denied any wrongdoing and has sought to cover up mistakes or misdeeds.

Christina Buerrosse, resident, stated that she has been a member of the Town's Planning and Zoning Board and has seen several changes in Town leadership over the years. She proposed that the Town Commission and Town Staff consider holding a weekly operations workshop. She noted that the Town faces critical challenges going forward, and recommended that the Commission retain steady leadership at this time.

Brian Paperny, resident and treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce, stated that he spoke tonight on behalf of Chamber of Commerce president Howard Goldberg. He provided a letter from Mr. Goldberg which expressed concern with challenges that have negatively affected the Chamber, local businesses, and the community. Mr. Goldberg's letter concluded that the Town Manager has demonstrated a pattern of demanding and dismissive behavior with respect to stakeholders, which has left the Chamber and its members feeling marginalized and fearful of retaliation.

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Kelly Byron, resident, advised that she supported the Town Manager, who has addressed several issues affecting residents during her tenure with the Town. She was happy with the Town Manager's professionalism and involvement in the community.

Don Prince, member of the public, stated that he worked for Lauderdale-By-The-Sea for over 30 years, during several of which he worked with the Town Manager. He felt she has the Town's best interests at heart and spoke in support of her.

Chris Vincent, resident, commented that he worked with multiple Town Managers during his tenure as Mayor and Commissioner, and spoke in support of the Town Manager, citing her professionalism, dedication, and collaborative spirit. He recommended that the Commission exhaust every alternative focused on reconciliation rather than making decisions without comprehensive communication.

Carlos Gianos, representing 4403 Tradewinds Inc., recommended better communication to address problems, and spoke positively of his experiences with the Town Manager and Town Staff. He was not in favor of changes at this time.

Ann Marchetti, resident, stated that the Town Manager lacks the qualifications and skills necessary for her position, and asserted that the Town deserves a visionary leader. She thanked the Mayor for bringing his concerns before the community.

Ron Piersante, resident, advised the Commission to evaluate the context and value the Town Manager brings to her position. He emphasized her dedication and professionalism, noting that she has received positive performance appraisals. He concluded that the problem could have been addressed individually and recommended constructive guidance.

Bill Ciani, property owner, stated that he respects the Town Manager despite past disagreements, and noted that she has upheld Town Code and assembled a Town Staff in which the Town can take pride.

Ross Tanenbaum, owner of Ocean Treasure Courtyard, described his interactions with the Town Manager over the past six years, speaking positively about Lauderdale-By-The-Sea's Staff. He expressed confidence in the Town Manager's leadership and recommended against changes to Staff without a strong reason.

With no other individuals wishing to speak at this time, Mayor Malkoon closed public comment.

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5. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Mayor Malkoon briefly addressed some of the issues raised during public comment, noting that the Town Manager's performance is evaluated on a daily basis. With regard to the position's annual performance review, he expressed concern that the current format may skew results in support of a favorable outcome, and suggested that the Commission review the form for potential changes.

Mayor Malkoon offered the Town Manager an opportunity to address the Commission at this time.

Town Manager Linda Connors stated that she remains committed to supporting the Town's residents, the full Commission, and Town Staff. She apologized for her offenses and recalled that she has made herself available to the Mayor for further discussion of them. She felt she has implemented the goals and directions of the Town Commission while maintaining regular outreach to the community.

Town Manager Connors continued that she felt her experience uniquely positions her to work with elected officials in accomplishing the Town's goals moving forward into the new fiscal year, and welcomed continued coordination with the Mayor and Commission.

Mayor Malkoon read the following statement into the record at this time:

Fellow Commissioners, we are gathered here tonight under serious but necessary circumstances. As elected representatives of this community, we have our duty not only to set policy but also to ensure that our administration operates with transparency, professionalism, and accountability to both this Commission and the residents of Lauderdale-By-The-Sea.

After a thorough review of recent events, ongoing patterns of behavior, and the contractual responsibilities of the Town Manager, I believe it is in the best interests of our Town that we move forward with a change in leadership. This recommendation is based on three key concerns: a breakdown in communication and accountability, a diminished ability to maintain a constructive working relationship with the Commission, and a loss of confidence that affects organizational effectiveness and cohesion. This recommendation is not based on a single disagreement or isolated incident; rather, it reflects a broader incompatibility in leadership approach, communication, and expectations that have led to a breakdown in trust and a need for a new direction regarding communication and accountability.

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On July 9, the day after a regular Town Commission meeting, I visited Town Hall intending to speak directly to the Town Manager. She was not present, nor was the Deputy Town Manager. The building was nearly unstaffed, with no one clearly designated as a responsible authority there in her absence. Despite this clear responsibility, I texted her the same day requesting a call or a follow-up, and received no reply. Roughly 90 minutes later, she sent a group text to the full Commission not in response to my outreach, but on a separate topic, stating that she would be out of town that weekend. My direct communication as Mayor was ignored entirely.

Under Section 1.2 of the Town Manager's employment agreement, she is contractually obligated to ensure operational continuity and proper oversight in her absence. Similarly, Section 5.5 of our Town Charter states she must exercise supervision over all Departments and Divisions. While she may argue that she is always reachable by phone, that claim is insufficient, as she fails to respond to the outreach from the Mayor.

The absence of a clear designee and delayed communication created uncertainty at a time when clear leadership was essential. Two days passed without any communication, so I submitted questions in writing relating to staffing, payroll, and security. Her response did not come until a week and a half later by email, and even then, no Commissioner had received it. When confronted at the July 22 Commission meeting, she forwarded that message to the full Commission, including inappropriate, in my opinion, personal commentary about me, knowing I cannot reply under Sunshine Law constraints, as it was sent to everyone.

This was not the first time communication challenges have occurred. Residents and business owners have been forced to follow up or copy me in order to receive replies to their inquiries, if they are answered at all. Vendors have been scheduled with meetings with me without my prior input or knowledge, only to be given limited options for availability as if the meetings were already confirmed.

Working relationship and oversight: these communication challenges are compacted by how the Town Manager responds when questioned or held accountable. At the Mayor/Manager Open House on Monday, July 15, she appeared visibly agitated. Before I could even ask a single question, she made comments implying I had no business coming by Town Hall the previous week. I reminded her that, as Mayor, I have every single right to visit Town Hall during normal business hours. This exchange, directed at me in a public setting, was unprofessional and disrespectful. It

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revealed not only personal grievance, but also a troubling resistance to oversight and accountability.

During that same exchange, the Town Manager informed me that a formal response will be sent to me by Staff by the end of the week. That response never came. This further illustrates a pattern of avoidance and a lack of follow-through, particularly when concerns are raised by Commissioners. This pattern continued during the most recent Commission meeting, where the Town Manager displayed combative behavior, in my opinion, both during the session and on recess. During that time, she appeared to imply that Staff privileges such as working from home could be revoked in response to oversight from the Mayor. Raising concerns about perceived retaliation had a chilling effect on Staff morale.

Another example was her scheduling a meeting with a BSO Major without informing or consulting me. I was presented with limited time options for meetings at a pre-selected date without any prior consultation or confirmation of my interest in participating. This bypassed the Mayor's role and undermined standard protocol. It reflects a broader pattern of unilateral decision-making that strains the working relationship and affects institutional respect.

Yet one more example that highlights this concern involved attempts to limit the Commission's ability to place items on agenda without our prior consensus, a move, in my view, sought to minimize the legislative authority of this body. I voiced strong opposition to this effort and worked to restore the Commission's clear right to set policy and raise issues independently. This was not a procedural debate. It reflected a broader tendency to consolidate control and restrict the governance role of elected officials, which is incompatible with the balance of powers outlined by our Charter.

Confidence in continuity: government functions best when built on trust between officials, staff, and residents. When inquiries go unanswered, communication becomes strained and oversight is treated defensively. Confidence is eroded not just in the Town Manager, but in the overall leadership of the Town.

These challenges are not isolated; they are systemic and ongoing. One example is a recent mishandling of the Fire/EMS contract, which was allowed to be cancelled because of the lack of prior oversight when the contract was negotiated or any clear explanations provided. We still don't have a set plan in place. Given the contract's significance to public safety and budget planning, this lapse created confusion within the community and further eroded confidence in executive leadership.

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In addition, the Town Manager has pursued external employment opportunities while still serving in her current role. While this is her personal right, it can introduce uncertainty within the organization and diminish Staff confidence in long-term leadership. Such actions further contribute to the perception of disengagement and raise concerns about continuity at the executive level.

The Town Manager's responsibilities are outlined in Section 1.2 of the employment agreement, "Ensuring Continuity and Commission Responsiveness," Section 5.5 of the Town Charter, "Supervision, Transparency and Collaboration," the Town Commission's meeting procedures, "Coordination, Attendance, and Timely Communication." This recommendation is made not to assign blame but to acknowledge that sustained leadership requires mutual trust and a shared vision, both of which have been compromised.

Conclusion: the Commission must act. The Town Manager serves at the pleasure of the Commission. Our role is to protect the functionality, cohesion, and transparency of our government. When those standards are no longer met consistently and clearly, it is our responsibility to act. I respectfully urge my fellow Commission to vote in favor of a leadership transition by terminating the Town Manager's contract without cause in accordance with her employment agreement. This decision reflects thoughtful and professional assessment of what is best for the Town moving forward.

Commissioner Pouloupoulos observed that the decision before the Commission is not an easy one, noting that the Town has run relatively smoothly; in order for this to continue, however, there must be clear communication between the Mayor and the Town Manager. He advised that at the July 22, 2025 Town Commission meeting, he had witnessed a breakdown in this relationship, which he felt represented the culmination of differences between the two parties based on respect.

Commissioner Pouloupoulos continued that issues facing the Commission include the replacement of the Town's Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) contract, how to address the demands of the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) with regard to their contract, and several capital projects. He concluded that he has spoken with the Town Manager and wished to hear from his fellow Commissioners as well, again emphasizing the status of the working relationship between the Mayor and Town Manager going forward.

Commissioner Graziano recalled that he had not participated in the Commission's most recent evaluation of the Town Manager, as he had felt it would almost guarantee that she

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received an annual raise. He had also wished his comments to be based on a full year to review. He added that when the Town Manager had reached out to him after tonight's special meeting was scheduled, he had texted her in response, stating that his goal was to protect the Town while acknowledging the Town Manager's years of history with the Town.

While he spoke positively regarding personal interactions with the Town Manager prior to his service as an elected official, Commissioner Graziano added that he found her to be controlling, particularly with respect to the Sunshine Law. He concluded that calling tonight's special meeting indicated that the relationship between the Mayor and the Town Manager cannot be repaired, and for this reason, he felt the Commission should find an appropriate way to terminate the Town Manager's contract without impugning or demonstrating disrespect to any individuals.

Commissioner Graziano strongly emphasized the importance of determining best practices in order to continue using Town Staff and their customer service abilities moving forward. He also expressed concern that the Town Manager's search for another job could compromise the Town in the future.

Vice Mayor Strauss asserted that it is the Town Commission and not the Town Manager which is charged with establishing policy, and they are accountable for the consequences of these policies. He recalled that the Commission voted in January 2025 to approve a work-from-home policy, and that the Town Manager cannot enact major decisions without their approval.

Vice Mayor Strauss advised that he has seen no evidence that the Town Manager has made decisions without Commission approval. He added that if concerns with the Town Manager position arise, the appropriate venue for their address is through the Town Manager Report during regular Commission meetings. Commissioners may also meet privately with the Town Manager to discuss any other matters. He felt it was appropriate to have one-on-one discussions with employees before raising any issues publicly.

Vice Mayor Strauss asked if Commissioners had met with the Town Manager prior to the July 22 meeting to express concerns related to the issues raised by the Mayor, or if the Town Manager was made aware of those issues prior to July 22. He also pointed out that the Town's form of government invests authority with the entire Commission rather than with one individual, and advised that he was troubled with how the situation had evolved, including his lack of knowledge of it before the last Commission meeting.

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Vice Mayor Strauss stated that should a vote at tonight's meeting lead to the termination of the Town Manager without a full and fair discussion, he would view it as suspect and politically motivated. He added that the issues raised at tonight's meeting suggest the possibility of retaliation against the Town Manager for placing a job application with another municipality.

Vice Mayor Strauss also pointed out that all steps related to the Fire/EMS contract were voted upon by the Commission, and they are ultimately responsible for any shortfalls in relation to that contract.

Mayor Malkoon stated that he found some of the Vice Mayor's comments to be disrespectful, pointing out that the Commissioners are constrained from discussing issues with one another outside the requirements of the Sunshine Law. He emphasized that the Mayor has the right to call a special meeting and raise the issues presented tonight, and felt the characterization of the issue as a personal squabble minimized his role as Mayor.

Commissioner Graziano asserted that he resented the implication that tonight's item was political. He stated that the discussion was based on the needs of the Town, including the need for cooperation between the Mayor and Town Manager.

The Commission took a brief recess at this time.

Commissioner DeNapoli requested clarification of what recourse a Mayor or Commissioner may have under the Sunshine Law in the event of a disagreement that has reached an impasse. Town Attorney Susan Trevarthen replied that one option mentioned earlier, a roundtable meeting, is historically considered a workshop setting where no action is taken.

Commissioner DeNapoli continued that Florida is an at-will employment state, which means a Town Manager serves at the pleasure of the Commission and is governed by the position contract. This means the employee may be terminated at any time and for any reason, subject to the terms of the contract, as long as the reason is not illegal, such as discrimination or retaliation. Town Attorney Trevarthen confirmed that the Town Manager contract specifically provides scenarios regarding termination. While the contract does not control procedural and notice requirements for special meetings, tonight's meeting was properly called and the Commission may take action.

Commissioner DeNapoli asked if there has been any activity or misconduct under the Town Manager contract which would legally trigger termination with cause. Town Attorney

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Trevarthen replied that while there have been discussions of performance at tonight's meeting, she had not heard anyone declare intent to dismiss with cause thus far. Reasons for termination apply only when the Commission seeks to terminate with cause.

Commissioner DeNapoli asked if the Mayor felt there are irreconcilable differences between himself and the Town Manager in matters such as leadership approach, communication style, and vision for the Town. Mayor Malkoon confirmed this.

Commissioner DeNapoli observed that it is not uncommon for political appointees such as the Town Manager to be dismissed upon a change in political leadership, as they serve at the pleasure of elected officials.

Commissioner Pouloupoulos noted that his decision would be based upon whether or not the Mayor and Town Manager can have the effective professional relationship that the Town requires. He continued that tonight's discussion is not a referendum on the Mayor, but reflects whether or not the necessary levels of respect and harmony exist between the two parties.

Vice Mayor Strauss commented that the Commission should ask itself what its plan would be if the Town Manager's contract is terminated, particularly in light of the ongoing budget season and contract negotiations with providers. He expressed concern that any Interim Town Manager must be able to take charge of that position right away.

Mayor Malkoon stated that his intent was to first request a vote to determine the Commission's direction, followed by a proposal for how the Town would move forward.

Commissioner DeNapoli advised that he shared the Vice Mayor's concern with what might happen next if the Town Manager's contract is terminated. Commissioner Graziano noted that he had not given significant consideration to the future of the Town Manager position, as he wished to know the Commission's intent regarding the current Town Manager before deciding how to move forward.

Town Manager Connors addressed some of the issues raised during the Commission's discussion, recalling that Commissioner Graziano had expressed concern with her seeking outside employment in another community. She confirmed that she had done this for reasons related to her family, and had applied for only one such position.

Mayor Malkoon stated that while he recognized the right of the Town Manager to seek other employment, he felt that letting Staff and the Commission know about this search

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created uncertainty. He also felt the Town Manager has demonstrated a pattern of pushing back against Commissioners who have given their opinions.

Town Manager Connors explained that she had communicated her intent to look for an outside position, as well as the reason why, to both Staff and the Commission as a means of protecting morale. In addition, representatives of the outside position may have contacted Town representatives to request references. She had chosen to err on the side of transparency. She further addressed Staff morale, stating that she has served as a mentor for many members and did not feel morale was an issue.

Commissioner Graziano stated that his concern had been that the Town Manager leaving her position could serve as a “poison pill” in the future. He added that while leadership of Staff is important, the relationship between the Town Manager and the Mayor is more important.

Commissioner Pouloupoulos stated that he did not take issue with the Town Manager’s application for a job in another community, and expressed confidence that the Town and its Staff would be able to continue moving forward in her absence. He again emphasized that his concern with whether or not the Town Manager’s and Mayor’s relationship was irreparably damaged.

Mayor Malkoon reiterated his concern with the lack of respect shown to him by the Town Manager, particularly at the July 22 Commission meeting. He felt his efforts to repair the relationship were ignored, and did not believe it could be improved.

Mayor Malkoon ceded the gavel to Vice Mayor Strauss at this time.

Mayor Malkoon made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Pouloupoulos, to terminate the Town Manager’s contract under the legal definition of without cause, effective immediately in accordance with the terms of her employment agreement. Motion carried 4-1 (Vice Mayor Strauss dissenting).

Mayor Malkoon made a motion that the Deputy Town Manager be appointed as Acting Town Manager, with further details to be discussed before and during our next scheduled meeting, and in the interest of protecting the Town’s operational security during this transition, Staff is directed to temporarily restrict the Town Manager’s access to Town Hall and systems and facilities previously under her sole control, including email access and physical key access; the Town Manager

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shall be afforded reasonable time to collect personal belongings and transition out respectfully on this or a coordinated future date if needed.

Deputy Town Manager/Public Works Director Ken Rubach indicated his acceptance of the change in position.

Commissioner Poulopoulos seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

Vice Mayor Strauss returned the gavel to Mayor Malkoon at this time.

Mayor Malkoon read the following statement into the record at this time:

Thank you, Commission, Staff, and residents. Tonight's decision was a serious one, made thoughtfully and respectfully and according with our responsibility to serve the best interests of Lauderdale-By-The-Sea. The Commission has voted to terminate the Town Manager's contract without cause, effective immediately. This is not a forceful or an urgent exit; the Town Manager will have reasonable time to collect her personal belongings and transition out respectfully on this or a coordinated future date as needed.

We have also approved a motion to temporarily restrict access to email and keys under the Manager's sole control as a standard security precaution during leadership transition. These steps are professional and not punitive, and reflect our commitment to maintaining operational continuity and stability.

In the meantime, we recommend that the Deputy Town Manager serve as our Acting Town Manager until we meet again to determine next steps.

Mayor Malkoon thanked all present for their attention and participation, and emphasized the value of Town Staff. He was confident in the Acting Town Manager's relationships with Staff as well as his knowledge of and participation in all aspects of the ongoing budget season, as well as in other aspects of the Town.

Acting Town Manager Rubach noted that he would not be present for the next scheduled Commission meeting on August 26, 2025. Town Attorney Trevarthen suggested that the Commission consider alternate dates for or cancellation of that meeting. She also noted that the Commission will need to enter into a Resolution to designate the Acting Town Manager, as required by the Town's Charter. The calculation of the former Town Manager's payout will come back before the Commission for their review.

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Town Attorney Trevarthen advised that the next meeting dates following August 26 were September 10, 2025, both of which included both a budget hearing at 5:01 p.m. and a regular Town Commission meeting at 6:30 p.m. Both September meeting dates are on Wednesdays rather than Tuesdays. There was Commission consensus to continue with the September 10, 2025 meetings as planned.

6. ADJOURNMENT

With no other business to come before the Commission at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.



Mayor Edmund Malkoon

ATTEST:



Courtney Easley, Acting Town Clerk

9/11/2025 | 2:14 PM EDT

Date